

The  
Ethical and Religious Theories  
of  
Bishop Butler



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The  
Ethical and Religious  
Theories  
of  
Bishop Butler

BY  
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1903

## PREFATORY NOTE.

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*To the Registrar,  
University of Toronto :*

SIR :—I recommend that the thesis entitled  
“ The Ethical and Religious Theories of Bishop  
Butler,” be accepted for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in the University of Toronto.

J. G. HUME,  
Professor of Ethics.

University of Toronto,  
October 8th, 1903.

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I hereby certify that the thesis above mentioned  
has been accepted by the Senate of the University  
of Toronto for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in accordance with the terms of the statute in that  
behalf.

JAMES BREBNER,  
Registrar.

University of Toronto,  
October 22nd, 1903.



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THE  
ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS THEORIES  
OF  
BISHOP BUTLER

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CHAPTER I.

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INTRODUCTION. BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE.

Joseph Butler, one of the most distinguished writers on theology and ethics, and probably the outstanding intellectual character of an age characteristically intellectual, was born in the little town of Wantage in Berkshire on the 18th of May, 1692. The youngest of eight children of a well-to-do retired tradesman, the son was sent to school, where he formed the resolution, as he wrote to a friend, "to make the search for truth the business of his life."<sup>1</sup> His great work of maturity, the "Analogy," is the undying testimony to the perseverance and considerable measure of success with which Butler realized that ambition of his early days.

Although Butler departed from the ways of his fathers, and left Presbyterianism to enter Oriel College, Oxford, in 1714, yet he confesses to his friend Clarke his dissatisfaction with an institution where he "feels obliged to quit his studies by the want of

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<sup>1</sup> Clarke's "Works," Vol. 2, Letter 4

encouragement to independent thinkers."<sup>1</sup> In fact he had quite made up his mind to "migrate" to Cambridge, to avoid the "frivolous lectures" and "unintelligible disputations" by which he had become quite tired out at Oxford.

Butler's plans, however, were interrupted, and the outward course of his life determined by his friendship with Edward Talbot, a Fellow of Oriel, and son of the Bishop of Salisbury. On the joint recommendation of Talbot and Clarke, Butler was nominated and appointed preacher at the Chapel of the Rolls in 1718, and continued there till 1726, delivering, from time to time, the course of Sermons<sup>2</sup> which have made so deep an impress upon the ethical thought of the English nation. On his appointment in 1726 to the lucrative benefice of Stanhope, he resigned the preachingship at the Rolls, and retired to the "Golden Rectory" to live among his own people in quiet seclusion and much solitude. Here in his northern parish for ten years incessantly he was employed upon working out the most profound and unanswerable defence of Christianity and revelation that the world has ever seen. During this period our information of his general mode of life is exceedingly scanty. He was remembered in the neighborhood chiefly as a man much loved and respected, who used to ride a black pony very fast,<sup>3</sup> (though a remoter tradition adds that he fell into reveries, and allowed the pony to graze at

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<sup>1</sup> Clarke's "Works," Vol. 2, Letter 4.

<sup>2</sup> Butler's "Fifteen Sermons."

<sup>3</sup> Bartlett's Butler, p. 76.

will), and whose known benevolence was much practiced upon by beggars.<sup>1</sup>

In 1733 Butler had been appointed Clerk of the Closet to Queen Caroline, and began to take his part in that brilliant metaphysical society which she loved to gather round her. For a time her interest in Butler seemed to wane, for Secker, who in the same year had become Chaplain to the King, mentioned his friend a year or so afterward to the Queen, who said she thought he had been dead. She repeated this to Archbishop Blackbourne of York, who replied, "No, Madame, he is not dead, but he is *buried*." <sup>2</sup> However this may be, the Queen became interested in Butler, and commanded his attendance, we are told, every evening from seven till nine.

The Queen died the next year, 1737, and just before her death recommended Butler to her husband. George II. accordingly, though rather reluctantly, appointed Butler to the Bishopric of Bristol, "a position," complained Butler in a private letter to Walpole, "neither very suitable to the conditions of my fortune, nor to the Queen's recommendation with which I was honored."<sup>3</sup> The Bishopric was in fact the poorest in England. However, an addition was made to his income in 1740 by bestowing on him the Deanery of St. Paul's.

In 1747 the Primacy, it is said, was offered to Butler, who is reported to have declined it on the

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<sup>1</sup> Egglestone.

<sup>2</sup> Hewy's "Memoirs," II.

<sup>3</sup> Letter dated Aug. 28, 1738.

ground that it was "too late for him to try to support a falling Church."<sup>1</sup> One of his nephews, John Butler, a rich bachelor, had previously shown his appreciation of the "Analogy" by exchanging a presentation copy from his uncle for an iron vice, belonging to a "shrewd Scottish solicitor" named Thomson. Hearing, however, that his uncle had a chance of the archbishopric he came up to town prepared to advance £20,000 to meet his first expenses.<sup>2</sup>

Butler's next step was his last upon earth. He was translated to the See of Durham in 1750, a dignity which he held for only two years, as a rapid decay of nature set in, which soon released him from all the earthly hindrances he has estimated so justly, and landed him in his heavenly rest in the 60th year of his age.

Butler never married. His personal appearance has been sketched in a few lines by Hutcheson :—  
"He was of a most reverend aspect, his face thin and pale, but there was a divine placidness which inspired veneration, and expressed the most benevolent mind. His white hair hung gracefully on his shoulders, and his whole figure was patriarchal."<sup>3</sup>

Such is the man who now presses his claims on our attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> National Biography, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> History of Durham, Vol. 1, p. 578.

Butler's works are :

(1) "Fifteen Sermons preached at the Rolls Chapel," 1726.

(2) "The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the constitution and course of nature, with 2 brief Dissertations (I). of Personal Identity, (II). of the Nature of Virtue." 1736.

(3) "Six Sermons preached upon public occasions."

These together with the correspondence with Clarke, form practically the sum total of Butler's works. The first collected edition was published in Edinburgh in 1804. Other writings have from time to time been attributed to him, but in all probability without foundation.

## PART I. ETHICAL.

### CHAPTER II.

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#### BUTLER'S ETHICAL ENVIRONMENT.

In order to get anything like an accurate estimate of the position of Butler in Ethical Thought, it is necessary to know something of the various theories which had been put forward before his time, and which he either opposed, or in some instances modified and adopted as a phase of his own contribution.

From the very first beginnings of ethical inquiry two distinct theories of the true basis of morals are more or less clearly traceable. The two schools are commonly known as the Intuitive and Utilitarian or Selfish. Broadly speaking, Intuitionism maintains that there is implanted in man a moral faculty, which discerns right and wrong independent of all desires for pleasure, and that this motive of right, commonly called Conscience, carries in itself the obligation to obey it. The Utilitarian or Selfish School follows along the opposite line, denying an innate moral faculty, and making virtue consist in "enlightened self-interest" of which the highest form is but to seek "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." Foremost among the moralists of the Intuition School are the names of Cudworth, Clarke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson, the latter a contemporary of Butler himself. The man who stands out as pre-eminently the

leader of Utilitarianism is Thomas Hobbes, the uncompromising advocate of the selfish philosophy. The theory of Hobbes was pushed to its cynical extreme by Mandeville, who took the lowest estimate of morality ever yet propounded in sincerity by a moralist—that morality is only a cunning device of rulers, by which men are coaxed or flattered to prefer the public interest to their own. Such a doctrine was sure to attract a certain class at first, but Mandeville found more readers than disciples, and Hobbes continued to remain the real representative of the selfish school.

Hobbes' writings stirred up a tremendous amount of opposition and discussion, which proved fruitful in the origination of new theories to confute him. This criticism of Hobbes can be roughly outlined as following upon the three great questions which he raised in the field of ethics concerning the nature of man. His view of man *as originally evil*, and in a "state of war" by nature, was combated in various ways. Cumberland tries to meet him on this point by asserting an original tendency in man to good; while Hutcheson maintains that man has a natural unselfishness, as well as a natural selfishness. It was felt that there was in man a higher nature than Hobbes' purely materialistic account allows for. *A second critique* was directed against Hobbes' explanation of the manner in which man was supposed to pass from this original "state of war" to a better and distinctively moral condition. "Morality rests on calculation," says Hobbes. The transition from the

earlier to the later condition is a calculation—a figuring out by reason as to what the outcome might be. Cudworth and Clarke were the first to question whether morality did not mean more than Hobbes' idea of mere conventionality. They insisted upon the fact that there is something in morality made up of necessity and immutability, and that it is not a thing of convention alone. They strike Hobbes in his most vulnerable point, in showing that it was an impossibility, upon a materialistic basis, to bring in the activity of thought and reason, and also in questioning the validity of his moral law as constituted upon such an insufficient view of reason. *The third line of attack* was directed against the whole aim of the process in Hobbes' mechanical system, which, starting with an original selfishness, ended in a sort of refined selfishness—but still selfishness. The objection offered to this position lay in the indisputable fact that man actually takes a consideration in the good of others. It was Shaftesbury who headed this third critique. He takes Hobbes at his starting point, and attacks his whole psychological foundation. As opposed to his original "state of war," Shaftesbury brings in three original principles, first, the natural affections, whose early movements are not merely affective but affectionate, as Conscience; secondly, self-affections, which were really a replica of Hobbes' own system, but now only introduced as a portion of the whole; and thirdly, unnatural affections, such as malevolence, etc. Over all, the moral sense determines the appropriate

relation of each to the others. The whole aim is to contradict and controvert the Utilitarian and Selfish position.

Now it is left for Butler to take a comprehensive view of the preceding criticisms against Hobbes, and to formulate them into an organized system, with such breadth of vision and deep practical purpose that his writings have made a wonderful impress upon English thought, and have done more than those of any other writer of his time to mould the course of modern English ethical research.

Butler's main purpose is to attack the mechanical selfish starting point of Hobbes, and its logical outcome, as worked out into thorough-going egoism by Mandeville. But Butler felt another danger pressing upon him, quite as dangerous in his eyes as that threatened by Hobbes' crude Hedonism. In fact he regarded no theory with more apprehension than that Rationalism which had sprung up with such rapidity in the years immediately preceding his own time. Perhaps the strongest attack upon Hobbes up to Butler's time, was Cudworth's appeal to "Reason," in controverting the mechanical calculative process by which man evolved his moral nature out of a state of mere selfishness. Cudworth was the most distinguished of the little group of thinkers at Cambridge in the 17th century, commonly known as the "Cambridge Platonists," who, embracing what they conceived to be the Platonic principles, endeavored to stem the materialistic tide by a counter appeal to the intellect

in morals. But the narrow view of Reason which they held worked out its own destruction, and the issues were so disastrous that Butler was led to distrust its use altogether. And his suspicion of its misuse was heightened by the period of Deistic thought which it ushered in, with all its mighty waves of unrestrained speculation and "free inquiry." When Toland, the first of the "higher critics," wrote his "Christianity Not Mysterious," deducing on his arbitrary definition of Reason that Christianity was, therefore, unreasonable, then Butler saw more clearly than ever in the Rationalistic School an exceedingly dangerous enemy to religion and morality. But unfortunately, Butler was unable to distinguish, in regard to Reason, its use from its misuse, and because Cudworth and the Deists had employed it in a narrow and wrong way, he rejects it altogether in his destructive work. In so far, however, as his constructive ethical system advances over the position of his predecessors in this regard, it is really by virtue of the unconscious recognition given to that same faculty of Reason, more truly considered, as revealed in the moral sense through his faculty of Conscience.

## CHAPTER III.

### HIS METHOD.

We come now to a consideration of *Butler's Method*, and it forms a significant factor in determining his ethical position. In his ethics, as in his theology, Butler had constantly in view a certain class of adversaries, who all participated in one common mode of thinking. Human nature had come to be looked upon as essentially selfish; disinterested actions had been sneered at as impossibilities by the masses, and were explained away into modifications of selfishness by the scientific moralists.

To meet this view, Butler is not content, as he is sometimes carelessly supposed to be, with simply asserting the natural supremacy of the conscience, which his opponents rejected as artificial and unreal; he also uses the more subtle and effective "argumentum ad hominem." For the first time in the records of ethical procedure, Butler attempts to lay hold of the truth in his opponent's theory, and show that it can be accounted for as part of a fuller and truer system. On the other hand, Cudworth, for instance, had merely struck at the weaker elements in Hobbes' theory, and substituted another in their place. Butler goes further in his method, and gathers in the elements of truth which Hobbes had suggested in his hedonistic position. He recognizes its partial claim, adapts it as such, and then adopts it on a different footing in his

principle of self-love, not any longer as a mere force acting selfishly, but as directed to an object outside itself, and as constituted in constant relation with the more distinctly social principle of Benevolence. Moreover in defining this same principle of self-love as "a calm self interest," Butler, almost unconsciously, takes over from Cudworth that work of Reason, whose misuse he had so much dreaded, and transformed it into the "reflexive principle" acting in all the passions and affections.

Butler's method is manifested once again in his use of Shaftesbury's psychological analysis, as the basis of what Butler submits as a fuller examination and truer explanation of the nature and constitution of man. Shaftesbury, as intimated above, had shown that there were natural affections, self-affections and unnatural affections. Now Butler first follows Shaftesbury in showing that the social affections, e.g., Benevolence, are no less natural than the appetites or desires which tend more directly to private interests. Then he goes further, and argues that mere pleasure is not the primary aim even of those impulses which Shaftesbury allowed to be "self-affections," but that pleasure is rather only the accompanying condition resulting from the affections having obtained their respective objects.

In brief, the method of Butler consists in the search for all that was good in the positions of those who preceded him, and while rejecting the false and insufficient, he so adapts the partial truth that in the

end he may arrive at a deeper and higher position in ethical inquiry.

The fundamental *starting-point* for Butler may with justice be called the teleological: "every work both of nature and art, is a system; and as every particular thing both natural and artificial is for some use or purpose out of or beyond itself, one may add to what has already been brought into the idea of a system, its **conduciveness to this one or more ends.**"<sup>1</sup> Ultimately this view of nature, as the sphere of the realization of final causes, rests on a theological basis; but Butler does not specifically discuss this aspect of the question in his ethical treatises.

The ethical question then is, as it was with Aristotle, "What is the end, the *τέλος* of man?" The answer to this question is to be afforded by an examination of the constitution of man, and an analysis of the facts of human nature, "whence," Butler thinks, "it will as fully appear that this our nature, i.e. constitution, is adapted to virtue, as from the idea of a watch it appears that its nature, i.e. constitution or system, is adapted to measure time."<sup>2</sup>

Now Hobbes, following the example set, in general, by Bacon, had already started the English psychological school of analysis in the field of ethical investigation, but the result he came to was that man is by nature found to be necessarily selfish—and the *τέλος* consisted merely in seeking pleasure and in avoiding

<sup>1</sup> Sermon II.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon II.

pain. On the contrary, Butler now asserts that a closer examination proves the truth of the counter proposition, that man is by nature a social being. For while the existence of self-love as a "calm self-interest" is admitted, yet there exists alongside of it the no less natural principle of Benevolence, prompting actions which have for their end the good of others. Moreover, among the particular passions, desires and appetites, the general tendency is not to private so much as to public good. Finally, the principle in man which reflects upon actions and their motives, approving of some and disapproving of others, undeniably declares that conduct right that tends to the general good. It is clear, then, in Butler's own words, "that mankind is a community, that we all stand in a relation to each other, that there is a public end and interest of society, which each particular is obliged to promote." Public and not private interest is for Butler the basis and end of man's moral nature and constitution.

The three-fold division into first, passions and affections; secondly, self-love and benevolence; and thirdly, conscience, is Butler's celebrated analysis of the constitution of human nature. In spite of obscurity and apparent carelessness in the use of terms, his handling of the several parts shows remarkable psychological power, and its value is seen in the success of its attack upon the principles inherent in the selfish system of ethics.

Butler's especial concern is to show that self-love and benevolence are, while distinct, yet in no sense

whatever opposed to the disinterested affections. This constitutes, without doubt, one of the most important features in his ethical psychology.

Again: Butler has made a definite, and what is generally conceded to be a satisfactory analysis of the constituents of man's nature. But he is not content to stop here; for the idea of human nature is not completely expressed in merely showing the parts of which it is made up. Butler thinks that whoever will consider the real nature and idea of any system will find that neither the several parts alone, nor yet as a whole, complete that idea, "unless in the notion of the whole you include the relation and respects which these parts have to each other." In doing this Butler has added clearness and conciseness to the conception of the ethical nature as a "related process," which both gives value to his system, and marks him as the forerunner of that modern psychological school which has been so successful in explaining experience on the ground of it being throughout just such a "related process" as Butler had asserted it to be.

## CHAPTER IV.

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### DISTINCTIVE ETHICAL VIEWS.

Butler's ethical discussions are confined almost entirely to those deep and sometimes dark dissertations which he preached at the Chapel of the Rolls, and afterward published under the name of "Sermons on Human Nature." Prepared as they were under the stimulus of early research and fresh contact with the schools, yet that same spirit of enterprise and search after truth was tempered and guided by a sober and mature mind, early trained to abstain from fruitless effort to reach inaccessible ground beyond human comprehension. The "Sermons" are intended to serve in this sphere of experience as an examination into man's moral constitution, and the vindication of conscience as ruling supreme amid the various faculties which form the basis of that constitution.

The different places in which Butler delineates the constitution of human nature are not everywhere fully consistent with each other, but the theory which seems most accurately to represent his views may be described as follows. Mankind have various principles of action ; these are :

First : Several particular appetites, passions and affections, each having its appropriate object.

Secondly : There are also the general principles of Benevolence, and rational Self-love, having as objects respectively the good of others, and of ourselves.

Thirdly : At the head of this hierarchy stands the principle of Conscience or Reflection, " which is in kind and nature supreme above all others, and which bears its own authority of being so."<sup>1</sup>

The distinction of the particular appetites, passions and affections from self-love and benevolence forms a peculiar feature in Butler's psychology. Their ethical peculiarity lies in the claim of these private desires, of contribution to public as well as to private good. It is, in other words, a direct contradiction to Hobbes' theory of action as based directly upon selfishness or mere selfish love. But the private desires are not mere selfish love or any form of it ; for self-love as such is the desire of a man's own pleasure, whereas the object of the appetites and passions is some " outward thing " other than self-gratification. Mere selfish love seeks things as means to pleasure ; the private appetites seek things, not as means, but as ends. Thus " a man eats from hunger and drinks from thirst,"<sup>2</sup> and though he knows that these acts are necessary for life, that knowledge is not the motive to his conduct. It is true that incidentally hunger promotes our private well-being, but in obeying its dictates we are not thinking of that as the object, but of the procuring of food.

Having established this much, the way is made easy for the introduction of the second great distinctive feature of Butler's ethical structure, namely,

<sup>1</sup> Sermon II.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon I.

to show that Benevolence is a part of our natural constitution. It is evident, moreover, that in contending that the benevolent affections are disinterested, no more is claimed for them than has been shown must be granted to the natural desires and springs of action.

Yet Benevolence and Self-love are to be distinguished. Although Benevolence is that natural principle in man "which is to society in some degree what self-love is to the individual,"<sup>1</sup> these two are clearly distinct, and must be so considered. In fact the existence of these two as distinct is the proof afforded that "we are made for society, and are intended to act for the good of society, as well as to take care of ourselves."<sup>2</sup>

Butler, however, has established their independence in order the better to prove their mutual co-operation. In fact he goes so far as to make the statement that "these two principles of Benevolence and Self-love are so far connected that we can scarce promote the one without the other."<sup>3</sup> One of Butler's chief aims, as pointed out in the general consideration above, was to establish the proof that Self-love and Benevolence are in no sense opposed to one another.

Now besides the private or public desires, and in addition to the two-fold regard to our own and the general welfare through Benevolence and Self-love, there is a principle in man in its nature supreme over all others. Butler maintains that you have not under-

<sup>1</sup> Sermon I.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

stood your nature, that you are unable to explain and reconcile its various constituents, that you have indeed left out the chiefest part of it, without which the rest can have no cohesion, if you do not recognize its supreme regulative faculty—the Conscience.<sup>1</sup>

What is most distinctive in Butler's treatment of the Conscience, is the conception of its nature and office. That office is supreme.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it depends for its credentials on no other part of human nature. It may be urged that Conscience is only one of the various parts of our nature, and therefore why are they not all equally to be followed? The answer is that the true view of nature shows that the following of nature is the following of Conscience, or "that superior principle in every man which bears testimony to its own supremacy."<sup>3</sup> It is by this faculty, natural to a man, that he is a moral agent, a law unto himself. It carries its own authority self contained within it.

You cannot form a notion of this faculty, Conscience, without taking in judgment, direction, superintendence. This conjunction with thought is a constituent part of the idea, that is, of the faculty itself.

And "had Conscience but strength as it has right, had it power as it has manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world."<sup>4</sup> Were there no such

<sup>1</sup> Sermon I.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon III.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon II.

<sup>4</sup> Sermon II.

supremacy, all actions would be on an equal footing. Impiety itself would be as suitable as reverence, and parricide would justify itself by the right of the strongest. Hence human nature is made up of a number of propensities in union with this ruling principle, which is infringed only by might prevailing over right. "Man has a power of right within, if he will honestly attain to it."<sup>1</sup>

Conscience, too, acts immediately, and is apparently an equally trustworthy guide in all men. "Let any plain man ask himself, 'Is this I am going about right or wrong?' . . . . I do not the least doubt but that this question would be answered agreeably to truth and virtue by almost any fair man in almost any circumstances."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Conscience, for Butler, is the tie which holds together religion and morality. As the faculty of approving or disapproving, in the last analysis, it constitutes the bond of union. Setting out from the belief in Theism, and combining it with the asserted reality of Conscience, he makes the necessary inference that the Being who possesses the highest moral equalities is the object of the highest moral affections. He contemplates the Deity, through the moral nature of man.<sup>3</sup>

Lastly, this principle admits of no analysis, or at all events Butler does not care to analyze it. It may be called "Conscience, moral reason, moral sense or divine

<sup>1</sup> Sermon II.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon III.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon III.

reason." It may be considered as a "sentiment of the understanding, or a perception of the heart, or both."<sup>1</sup> Most frequently the synonym applied and employed for conscience is "Reflection." In the face of these distinct assertions of the close connection between the reason and the moral sense, it is remarkable perhaps that Butler should so often have been thought to be a mere "Intuitionist." True his fear of the Rationalists made him over-guarded in the usage of the term, but his whole treatise, and his reference to the nature of Conscience especially, bear the hall mark of non-intuition stamped ineffaceably upon it.

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<sup>1</sup> Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue; also Sermon III.

## CHAPTER V.

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### ESTIMATE OF BUTLER'S ETHICAL POSITION.

It will have been seen that Butler, in his investigations into the foundation of morals, does not use the old-time a priori method of inquiry, that is to say, he does not examine what he calls, "the abstract relations of things" as laid down and followed out by such writers of his period as Clarke and Cudworth. He sets himself to examine what he terms "human nature"—the constitution of the human mind.

In adopting this method of appealing to observation of facts, Butler is following in the wake of Bacon, who was the first to introduce the experimental method into ethical and scientific inquiry, but with the originator the investigation had been limited considerably to the psychological aspect of the question. His method may not be free from criticism, but its defects are due rather to over-zeal in combating the false theories which he had to meet, than through failure to see the truth for which that method stood.

Butler's system has been objected to by some as virtually utilitarian, in that it is said to regard Self-love as the single inherent characteristic of virtuous actions. Matthew Arnold finds fault with him here not so much indeed for the general assertion of the principle that there is no opposition between a desire for our private interest and benevolence towards others, but for the arbitrary definition of Self-love on

which that assertion is based. To expressly define Self-love as a "cool, deliberate pursuit of private interest," and then to say that from self love, *so defined*, love of our neighbour is no more distant than hatred of our neighbor, is in Arnold's view, to sophisticate things. He believes that Butler's psychological system is radically defective in his identification of the selfish and unselfish in the man, for only from the higher self can virtue be evolved.

If it had not been for Butler's rather unfortunate terminology in the use of the word "Self-love," and his neglect to emphasize the rational side of that faculty, Matthew Arnold might the more readily have seen that his criticism of Butler's system as selfish was only partly true. Butler's great aim was to combat the selfish position, and his system taken as a whole, in spite of ambiguities in expression, is without doubt a counter argument to the selfish theory.

When Butler treats of the relation between Self-love and Benevolence, he presents the key-stone to the whole structure which he had erected. In so far as Arnold accuses him of identifying the two, there would at first sight seem to be some justification in the charge when Butler admits that "Benevolence is no more disinterested than any of the particular affections." But Butler meets the hedonistic proposition, that all action is selfish, by the doctrine that no particular action or desire has mere self or pleasure as its end. For this purpose Butler pointed to the whole class of affections, which, although they may also

tend to private interest, have an immediate reference to the good of others. Butler identifies Self-love and Benevolence only to this extent, that there is no peculiar contrariety between them; in fact they are mutually involved; and he shows admirably well, that unless there were principles of action independent of self, there could be no pleasures and interests for self-love to watch over. A regard to our own general happiness is not mere selfishness. It is the weakness of the social affections manifested in Benevolence, and the strength of the private desires of self-love which properly constitutes selfishness. **But it is absurd to say that the pleasure of Benevolence is selfish because it is felt by self; and it is no more just to refer the private appetites to self-love because they commonly promote happiness.**

Butler's peculiar claim as a moral teacher consists in his having placed in unassailable supremacy the authority of the human Conscience. As was remarked in regard to his system, it is not that Butler was himself the originator of such a view, nor yet can it be established that his view was as free from defects as those of writers on the subject who came after him. But Butler simplified and reduced the theory to a practical issue, and swung round the whole moral system to revolve about its proper centre. Plato lived before his time when he placed Reason as lawful sovereign over the soul of man. And Kant has followed Butler, though quite independently, in assigning to Conscience the enforcement of the higher kind

of duties, through the "categorical imperative." It has been left to the ingenuity of T. H. Green to bring out the truths somewhat concealed in both, in harmonizing the action of the Reason and the Will by the higher principle which gives validity to the peculiar sphere of each.

The most palpable defect in Butler's account of Conscience presents itself in the apparently shifting character of the moral criterion. It affords no answer to the question, "What is the distinguishing quality common to all right actions?" For if they were to be judged by their being approved and enjoined by Conscience, at once there is left open the objection that such a theory of Conscience would be merely arguing in a vicious circle: first defining virtuous acts to be those which Conscience approves, and then making Conscience the faculty which approves virtuous acts. Butler, in fact, has to admit that the moral sense at times requires correction, and can be improved by education and training. But he cannot, on his theory, set the standard for this correction and improvement, although he suggests that it has its ultimate authority in God.\* Butler has at any rate established his position against his opponents in maintaining the supremacy of Conscience.

Though one cannot but admire the moral courage with which Butler has set forth this claim to the supremacy of Conscience, and the immediacy of its action, yet it must frankly be admitted that his defence is even here defective in some respects. True

\*NOTE—Butler emphasizes this truth in his religious writings.

his "moral sense" is not the crude sense perception of the early Intuitionist School. Yet the Conscience of Butler is not safeguarded as the enlightened and educated conscience of the thinking being, but is explicitly described as the untutored conscience of the ordinary "plain honest man." That the conscience admits of education, and that the uneducated conscience is a very inadequate guide, are considerations of which Butler does not take sufficient heed.

Butler's examination of the constitution of man seems, therefore, to be limited to the consideration of only a species and that not the highest species in human nature. It appears to take for granted that, irrespective of intellectual conditions, human nature is always alike; and therein exposes itself to the obvious criticism of neglecting actual variations in conditions, with no determination of the laws of such ethical varieties. It is because of this, in part, that Butler fails to see the need of imparting any external standard or criterion. As he recognizes no variety in the moral feelings, he feels no necessity for a test by which to discriminate between them.

Further still, it is this non-variation in moral conditions, and the assumption of the identity of the moral nature in all men, that affects Butler's application of the theory of final causes to morality. It is constantly assumed (e.g. in the Sermons on Resentment and Compassion) that our varied affections were implanted by God in us just as they are to-day, without history, without growth, and having undergone

no adaptation to the changing conditions of the men of every age. It is this purely statical view which in fact accounts for most of the deficiencies in Butler's treatment or non-treatment of the moral criterion.

Deeply as Butler has drawn from the best writers of the past, his greatness as a real discernor into the fundamental truths in ethics is no less manifest in his influence upon, and unconscious anticipation of, the writers who have succeeded him up to the present day. Even Hume's psychological analysis of man's nature into "Passions direct and indirect, and Sympathy," finds its partial counterpart and type in Butler's previous divisions. It was given to Butler also to emphasize the appeal to facts in experimental psychology, and it was he who centred its great system in the two foci of the "unity" and "relativity" of experience, around which all true scientific and moral investigation revolves to-day.

It is not at all probable that Kant was acquainted with the writings of Butler; much less is it likely that he borrowed from the author of the "Analogy" in working out his system. And yet there are traces of what may be termed unconscious anticipation in several parts of the latter's works.

There is in the first place a line of similarity between the two writers in the method in general which they both employed. That method might be descriptively termed *constructive criticism*. The plan of their works was to take up into themselves what had characterized the previous lines of thought, show

the imperfect nature of the fundamental notions therein employed, adopt whatever of truth was contained, and work out a newer and truer solution of the whole. And as their general line of action was the same, so were their critics agreed in misconceiving and undervaluing its real intrinsic value. Butler attacked Deism, but the real force of the attack was constituted by the way in which he took the Deists on their own ground, and with keen discrimination adapted and adopted their half-truth in emphasizing the place of reason, at the same time showing the insufficiency and error of their treatment. And Kant met the Rationalists of his time by the same policy of inclusion. He showed them that their view was but a partial estimate of a truth which was greater than they knew, and then led the way to its fuller apprehension. T. H. Green in like manner abolished the purely naturalistic position by showing that their science so called could only be explained on the assumption of a principle of relativity which their naturalism had at first rejected.

Another part of Butler's treatise where one is led on to Kant is in regard to their common emphasis of Morality. It is remarkable that both make the moral faculty and the discussion surrounding it the centre of their systems. In Butler the reason for this is not hard to find. To him the Christian religion was largely a moral scheme. In fact, throughout the whole of the "Analogy" the real interest which lay closest to Butler's heart was the ethical. His entire

cast of thinking was practical. Kant, too, laid special emphasis on the moral life. The philosophy which had preceded him had degenerated into unprofitable speculations and what Green called "hypostatized abstractions."

The result was that both men re-centred religious discussion and philosophic thought around the practical and ethical aspects. The conscience was brought into the bright light of prominence. And not only so, but each in his own way indicates its absolute and unique authority and supremacy in the moral life. Butler's self-interest and benevolence rear their lesser thrones, only to bow down in common obeisance to the supreme authority of conscience. And Kant holds that when the practical reason reveals to us the moral law it includes with it the obligation to obey it. Pure reason and speculation cannot affect the life of man, for they are beyond "experience," but the categorical imperative of practical reason is the supreme and binding principle of all action. Butler gave conscience and the moral life a place and value which Kant unwittingly and yet none the less truly duplicated in his "Critique of the Practical Reason."

Butler was not perfect by any means. Yet even Leslie Stephen is compelled to bear testimony that "with all his faults Butler remains, in the practical sense, the deepest moralist of the century."<sup>1</sup> In his "Sermons" Butler has made substantial and lasting contributions to moral and religious science, and it

may be said with confidence that in their own department nothing superior in value has appeared during the long interval between Aristotle and Kant or Green. Butler will always remain one of the great leaders in English thought, and his position in ethics will continue as a large contributor to its real and permanent advancement.

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## PART TWO—RELIGIOUS.

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### CHAPTER VI.

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#### CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.

The age in which Butler lived might well be called the age of National Indifference to Religion. It had succeeded an age of comparative indifference to all serious thought. There was scepticism enough in both, but that of the latter was the more intellectual and acute. Swift declared that as far as his observation went "few had faith in a religion," and that "great numbers openly avowed their disbelief in all revelation." Hartley, the Physician and Philosopher, writing a few years later speaks of "the great growth of atheism and infidelity, especially in the higher ranks of life." In fact the bonds of authority, whether intellectual, moral, civil or religious, had been loosened altogether by the events of the last half century.

Butler's position in contemporary speculation was thus unique. The misuse of Christian dogma for bitter religious party strife had resulted in the authority of the Scriptures becoming openly questioned. Reason was appealed to in its stead, and men boldly claimed to judge of the former by the latter. So there gradually was developed that spirit of independent inquiry, called in the seventeenth century Rationalism; which early in the eighteenth century became known as Free-thinking, and whose most prominent representatives

are usually classed under the name of Deists. Deism as a fact in English thought takes its rise mainly from Herbert, Toland and Collins. Its greatest period of development was in the general upheaval following the Revolution of 1688.

Previous to the growth of this disposition to reject authority, and to subject all questions to the decision of reason, morals and religion had been supposed to rest upon the same basis. Gradually all this was changed. "Free Inquiry" was applied alike to the sources of both; and the result was often the practical divorce of morality from religion. The whole course of nature, including man's moral powers, was henceforth subjected to mere reason; life must be regulated by reason. If, therefore, religion were to enter as a factor into the conduct of men, it must exhibit to reason the title deeds of its existence; Christianity must be reasonable. But with such a half-view of reason it was easy for the Deists to make a successful attack upon at least one position of the Christian scheme. A mystery by its very definition involved elements not capable of being represented in its entirety to reason; it was therefore unreasonable and must be entirely rejected.

The course of their argument carried the Deists farther. The fact of God's existence they were willing to grant; it was a dictate of reason. But they were not prepared to go beyond that, and the necessary deductions from it. The truths of natural religion thus took the form of inferences drawn from certain

premises ; they were displayed in a coherent, perfectly 'rational' system. Revealed religion, on the other hand, was confessedly imperfect, contained things not in accordance with natural reason, inculcated duties on the ground of mere authority, was not universally and completely known, and must therefore be rejected.

A classification of the writers in the Deistic controversy would by no means place all Deists in the one category. Deism had two sides. It was not only destructive. It was also positive and constructive in its criticism.

There had for many years been premonitory symptoms of coming storm, but the controversy with orthodoxy may be said to have really first broken out in the last years of the 17th century. In the years 1695 and 1696 two books of significant titles appeared—Locke's "Reasonableness of Christianity," and Toland's "Christianity Not Mysterious." The two represent the respective constructive and destructive aspects of the Deistic criticism. The conjunction was unfortunate, for Locke was unmistakably free from the slightest complicity in any attack upon the authenticity of the Christian revelation. No minister of the present day could accept the plenary inspiration of the Bible in a more literal way, or in simpler faith than Locke professed to do.

But Toland's position was a totally different one. Toland was early driven to suspect the claims of dogmatic authority, as put forward by the Roman Church. He became a convert to Protestantism at 16.

But, finding there much the same atmosphere of assumption, he felt forced to reject the commonly accepted basis of religion, and to strike out for himself upon independent lines of inquiry. It is a mistake to suppose that Toland and Deists in general absolutely rejected all belief in religion or revelation. And on the other hand the churchmen held doctrines which were eminently reasonable. Yet in their common suspicion of the other's partial views, they adopted the "all or nothing policy," and in emphasizing their own view of truth forgot to recognize its co-ordinate in the other's view which they really held. The result was that the two parties were thrown hopelessly apart, and the really harmonious truths of reason and revelation were allowed to be thought of as contradictory and mutually exclusive of each other.

The effect upon Toland was to make him enlarge more and more upon the place of reason in nature and religion. Succeeding pamphlets displayed from time to time an increasing tendency to not merely recognize the reasonableness of revelation, but also to minimize any other element which was claimed for it other than reason. These pamphlets served to pave the way for his first and great book, "Christianity not Mysterious." It was the firing of the first gun which brought on the general action, and aroused the latent sentiment into open opposition to all revelation. Locke had argued that Christianity was reasonable. His aim was a defence of revelation at the bar of reason. But Toland tended to reduce all revelation

to the limits of his own preconceived idea of reason. The attitude of the two men represents to a fair degree the respective significance of the positive and negative sides of the Deistic movement.

Toland's argument begins with a criticism of dogmatic authority. So far he is in accord with the constructive criticism of Locke and even Butler. But by a more daring pretence of logic he proceeds to demonstrate that reason is the only ground for all certainty. (*Christianity not Mysterious*, p. 6.) His argument when pushed to its extreme (though Toland would hardly have it go so far) would lead to the conclusion that the mysterious as supernatural is opposed to nature, and therefore must be expelled from religion.

The line of destructive Deism instituted by Toland was followed out and elaborated in some of its minor details by Wollaston. It was not until 1730 however that there appeared a book, which may be said to have marked the culminating point of the whole Deistic controversy. It came with the advent of Tindal.

Matthew Tindal, a fellow of All Souls', had been a resident at Oxford when Toland had opened the great campaign against supernaturalism. Tindal opposed now all historical religion, especially as contained in the Biblical account. He ridiculed the idea that the Almighty creator and ruler, the builder of the universe, the planner of souls, of systems and of planets, should be identified with the God

who is represented as selecting a small, barbarous and obscure tribe in one little corner of the earth, as the sole recipient of His favor.

Tindal's God was not enveloped in any mystery of thick clouds and darkness. Every man could fathom the Divine nature. Doctrines not revealed to all cannot be doctrines imposed upon all by God: reason, the only faculty granted to all men, must of necessity be sufficient to guide all men to truth. Reason is of necessity the sole judge, for universal scepticism is the only alternative; "the very attempt," he says, "to destroy reason by reason is a demonstration that men have nothing but reason to trust to."<sup>1</sup>

In Tindal's view, therefore, obedience to nature is the one sufficient principle to happiness. "Whoever" "so regulates his natural appetites as will conduce" "most to the exercise of his reason . . . . may be" "certain he can never offend his Maker."<sup>2</sup> And again he says, "The perfection and happiness of all rational beings, supreme as well as subordinate, consists in" "living up to the dictates of nature." And again, "The" "happiness of all individuals consists in the perfection" "of their nature; and the nature of a rational being" "is most perfect when it is perfectly rational . . . ." "for then it arrives at the most perfect, and consequently the happiest state a rational nature can" "aspire to."<sup>3</sup>

Tindal maintains moreover that the religion of

<sup>1</sup> Christianity as old as Creation, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

nature is an absolutely perfect religion. He heads Chapter number VI. with this statement. And he goes on to say that "external revelation can neither add to, nor take from, its perfection. "I desire no more than to be allowed that there's a religion of nature and reason written in the heart of every one of us from the first creation. Natural religion and external revelation, like two tallies, exactly answer one another, without any other difference between them but as to the manner of their being delivered."

The only immutable thing is the law of nature. And the reason why it is immutable is because it is founded on the unalterable reason of things : if, on the other hand, God is an arbitrary Being, and can command things from will and pleasure, "there is nothing in the nature of God to hinder Him from perpetually changing his mind."<sup>1</sup>

It is Tindal's opinion, too, that the non-adherence to these notions reason dictates concerning the nature of God, has been the occasion of all superstition. "If what the light of nature teaches us concerning the Divine perfections, when duly attended to, is not only sufficient to hinder us from following into superstition of any kind whatever, but demonstrates what God can or cannot command, . . . how is it possible that the law of nature and grace differ?"<sup>2</sup>

Tindal's whole work, in short, is an attack directed to undermining the foundations of revelation, and

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<sup>1</sup> Christianity as old as Creation, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 103

belief in the supernatural in religion. Constructive Deism represented that school on its positive and ethical side. They did not openly criticize revelation so much as they laid the way open for such destructive attacks by attempting to make religion harmonize with their peculiar and insufficient views of reason. It was not a far cry for Collins and Toland, and others who followed, to forget largely the ethical and neglect the positive side, in their criticism of miracles as mysterious, and in a general destructive critique of the Christian revelation as unnecessary for and in fact contrary to the religion of nature.

The whole aim of the "Analogy" was to combat and overthrow this destructive and negative attack of later Deism. Religious and speculative topics so momentous could not fail to stir the interest and arouse the anxiety of a mind like Butler. And Butler crushed Deism. His answer was overwhelming. He took the Deist on his own ground. The Deist accepted nature, but rejected revelation as unreasonable. Butler shows that the same difficulties are to be found in each, and one cannot therefore be rejected and the other accepted, for both are equally worthy of belief. He simply disabuses an a priori idea, a foregone conclusion in the mind of the Deists. With this particular purpose in view, Butler's work must be admitted to be completely successful.

Butler however goes further, and demonstrates that in spite of seeming difficulties there are fundamental principles of truth behind them which are

wide enough to allow for them and to lead the way to final solution in a harmonious and all comprehensive scheme. This positive suggestion of light enough through shadows to reveal the goal ahead, and of a time when things apparently contradictory and unexplainable will be found to have their place in a great universal system, is the glory of Butler's work. Far from tending to scepticism by increasing difficulties, as his critics thought, the "Analogy" really establishes more firmly the grounds for positive belief.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE METHOD OF ANALOGY.

The method and course of Butler's religious argument will be more easily understood, and the more clearly seen when it has been considered what were the premises on which he proceeded, and what the object he had in view.

Butler, like Bacon, is characteristic of English philosophical thought. His method is like Bacon's—it is the method of experience and observation, as opposed to mere hypothesis. To him the universe is not to be entirely comprehended by human intelligence, or deciphered by human thought. It is a constitution or system, made up of individual facts, through which we thread our way slowly and inductively. Induction and scientific observation as contrasted with deduction and authority are the hall marks of Butler's system. Complete knowledge is impossible. Experience and observation of the facts of life prove to us that probability and belief are the guide of life. Reason has its place, and is certainly to be accepted: it is our natural light, and the only faculty whereby we can judge of things. But it is only partial. It gives no completed system of knowledge, and in matters of fact affords only probable conclusions.

In short, Butler's work might with much propriety, be designated the "Novum Organum" of theology. The aim of the two books, in their

respective departments, is the same. Before Bacon wrote, many had discovered the truth by observing without any scientific ordination the laws which he laid down; but unlicensed speculation was the rule, and such sober inquiry the exception. Bacon demanded that speculation should wait on inquiry, that science should accord with facts instead of being in antagonism with them; in other words, he taught the limits of thought in science, and showed that when these limits had been transgressed, error, and not truth, had emerged. This he did with an amplitude of learning, a splendor of imagination, a vigor of logic and brilliancy which have won and shall continue to win, the admiration of ages. Now Butler pursued, with different faculties, the same end in his own department. He gave no evidence of the brilliancy of imagination which Bacon displayed. His subject allowed no scope for terse and fresh illustrations such as were given in the writings of the other. Yet his moral honesty, his intense conscientiousness of investigation, the cautious putting forth of every thought and expression is altogether unparalleled in our experience. It is such characteristics which give to Butler as a religious writer the position of solitary grandeur on that "hill of God" unto which none can ascend but such as are of clean hands and a pure heart; and amply fulfil the promise of his youthful profession: "I design the 'Search after Truth' as the business of my life."

\* From a letter to Clarke.

That truth he believed he found by careful inquiry. He found it not in airy speculations, but in attention to the harmony between the principles of divine revelation, and those which seemed to be expressed in the constitution and course of nature. His limits, like those of Bacon were found in facts, and nothing was accepted by him which was not drawn directly from those facts, by induction or analogy. He did not profess to have discovered the whole truth, but what he did profess to have found he proved to be the product of persevering and conscientious inquiry.

Butler makes it plain from the very first that our knowledge is limited. And it is this sure conviction of the imperfect character of man's knowledge of nature, and of the grounds for its limitation, which makes Butler an opponent so to be feared by his Deistical contemporaries. He will permit no anticipations of nature, nor a priori conceptions of experience. "The constitution of nature is what it is" and no system of abstract principles can be permitted to take its place. So far he takes common ground with Hume: the course of experience is to form the basis of all reasoning. But in one essential respect he goes beyond Hume. The "course of nature" is for him an unmeaning expression unless it be referred to some author; and he therefore makes extensive use of the teleological method. This position is assumed throughout the treatise, and as against the Deists with justice, for their whole argument

rested upon the pre-supposition of the existence of God, the perfect Ruler of the world. So much then for the premises with which Butler starts. They are three in number, namely, (1) the imperfect character and necessary limitations of our knowledge ; (2) the known course of nature and experience as the basis of our reasoning ; and (3) behind all the existence of God as the intelligent author. These are the postulates on which he builds up his work.

Now what is Butler's aim ? what does he wish to prove ? It is *not* his intention to prove God's perfect moral government over the world, or the truth of religion. His work is in no sense a philosophy of religion. His purpose is entirely defensive ; he wishes to answer objections that have been brought against religion, and to examine certain difficulties that have been alleged as insuperable. And this is to be effected in the first place by showing that from the difficulties and obscurities we meet with in nature we may reasonably expect to find similar difficulties in the scheme of religion. If difficulties be found in the course and constitution of nature, whose author is admitted to be God, surely the existence of similar difficulties in the plan of religion can be no valid objection against its truth and divine origin. The author is willing to admit that this mode of arguing is *per se* but a negative and incomplete defence in religion ; yet he points to a wider issue. He seeks to show not only that the difficulties in the system of natural and revealed religion have counter-parts in

nature, but also that the facts of nature, far from being adverse to the principles of religion, are a distinct ground for inferring their probable truth. He endeavors to prove that the balance of probability is entirely in favor of the scheme of religion, that this probability is the natural conclusion from the inspection of nature, and that, as religion is a matter of practice, we are bound to adopt the course of action which is even *probably* the right one. "If," we can imagine him saying, "the precepts of religion are entirely analagous, in their partial obscurity and apparent difficulty, to the ordinary course of nature disclosed to us by experience, then it is credible that these precepts are true, and not only can no objection be drawn against them from experience, but the balance of probability is in their favor." This mode of reasoning from what is known of nature to the probable truth of what is contained in religion is the celebrated Method of Analogy. This Method of Analogy is best explained by a resume of Butler's argument as contained in the work chiefly under our consideration.

## CHAPTER VIII.

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### BUTLER'S RELIGIOUS WRITINGS.

Keeping clearly in view his premises—the existence of God and the limited nature of man's knowledge—Butler begins by inquiring into the fundamental prerequisite of all natural religion—the immortality of the soul. Evidently the whole stress of the question is here. Were man not mortal, religion would be of far less value. Now Butler does not attempt to prove his doctrine; the proof of its truth comes from another quarter. The only questions he asks are: Does experience forbid us to admit immortality as a possibility? Does experience furnish our probable reason for inferring that immortality is a fact? To the first of these a negative, to the second an affirmative answer is returned. All the analogies of our life here lead us to conclude that we shall continue to live after death; and neither from experience nor from the reason of the thing can any argument against the possibility of this be drawn. In the course of his treatise on a future life Butler enumerates three facts in the analogy of nature which suggest the immortality of the soul, (1) the great changes in nature and in human beings; (2) the continuance of every power in nature until some force is exerted against it to destroy it; and (3) the non-dependence of the intellectual powers upon the body, the organs of which indeed are but instruments (as much as glasses but serve the eye) by which the conscious being acts.

Now what makes the question of a future life really important to us is the supposition of our happiness or misery in that life, depending upon our behaviour in this. Whatever speculation may say as to God's purpose being necessarily universal benevolence, the fact is a matter of experience that our present happiness and misery depend on a certain course of action, and are not distributed indiscriminately. Therefore by analogy there is at least nothing incredible in our being rewarded or punished for our actions hereafter. As to divine punishment there is left "no pretence of reason for people to think themselves secure" that there is no analogous state of things hereafter. The whole analogy of nature is in favor of such a dispensation: it is therefore reasonable or probable.

In Chapter III, Butler goes a step further in his argument regarding rewards and punishments. We are not only under a government in which actions considered simply as such are rewarded and punished, but it is known from experience that virtue and vice are followed by their natural consequences—happiness and misery. And though the distribution of these rewards is not perfect, all hindrances are plainly temporary and accidental. It may therefore be concluded that the balance of probability is in favor of God's government in general being a moral scheme, where virtue and vice are respectively rewarded and punished.

The deists laughed at the "injustice of a man

being lost eternally because of yielding to temptation here," for they claimed that "in a world of trials, and difficulties, and dangers, it would be unjust to punish an evil doer." But Butler answers this objection with the proof that the very same conditions of trial and probation hold good in nature. Experience shows man to be in a state of trial so far as regards the present ; it cannot, therefore, be unreasonable to suppose that we are in a similar state as regards the future.

The fact of the moral government of the world has been shown to be credible from the analogy of its natural government. Now Butler proceeds to prove that its credibility is not destroyed by the hypothesis of necessity. Butler argues that *practically*, even supposing necessity to be true, we act as if it were false. Besides we are conscious of a will and a character in ourselves. So in the case of the Author of Nature : His being the designer and governor of the world implies His possessing such will and character. The conclusion therefore is that so-called necessity in no way interferes with the proof that the Author of Nature will in His eternal government bestow happiness and misery on His creatures according to their behaviour.

Finally, it can surely never be advanced as an argument against the truth of religion that there are many things in it which we do not comprehend, when experience exhibits to us such a copious stock of incomprehensibilities in the ordinary course and consti-

tution of nature. To such an argument Butler replies that "the scheme of Providence is too vast and of too large extent for our capacities," so that "our ignorance is the proper answer to many things which are called objections against religion."

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## CHAPTER IX.

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### HIS VALUE AS A CHRISTIAN APOLOGIST.

The conclusions which Butler has drawn in his "Analogy" have not been allowed to go unchallenged. As was to be expected, the cautious and sober line of argument pursued, the very care which he has taken to assume nothing in his premises which would not be generally admitted by those to whom he addressed himself, and to content himself with a conclusion which amounted at best to a moral and not to a mathematical demonstration, has drawn upon him attacks, more or less severe, from various quarters, alike from those who have been keen to detect any weakness in the alleged proofs of revelation, and from those who, like himself, have been earnest apologists for Christianity.

In his own day no opponent came forward whom Butler felt called upon to answer. For more than a century the "Analogy" enjoyed, among Christian controversialists generally, an unchallenged reputation as one of the best manuals upon the evidences of revelation. Southey has gone so far as to claim for its author, in the inscription on his monument in Bristol Cathedral, the merit of having constructed an "irrefragable proof" of the Christian revelation—a claim which he himself would surely not have made, because such proof was what he never attempted.

Murmurs of dissent, however, have been heard

from time to time. Pitt is reported to have said, in conversation with Wilberforce, that the book "had raised in his mind more doubts than it had answered." But the most formidable attacks upon Butler have been reserved for our own days, and have proceeded chiefly from those who, though they would range themselves with the author of the "Analogy" as to the main object which he had in view, differ from him as to the value of the line of defence which he adopted.

The writers who have recently assailed the "Analogy" have perhaps their leading representative in Dr. Martineau. In his "Studies of Christianity" he regards the "Analogy" as "having furnished, with a design directly contrary, one of the most terrible of persuasives to atheism that has ever been produced," apparently on the ground that it is possible by substituting the idea of nature for the idea of God, to turn the whole course of Butler's argument in that direction. The great objection urged by Martineau, and by Miss Hennell\*, is that the whole argument of the "Analogy" is an "argumentum ad hominem." As Martineau has put his case most strongly, we shall allow him to speak.

"It is altogether an "argumentum ad hominem" "addressed on behalf of ecclesiastical Christianity to "the believer in simple Theism. Go with me one "mile," says Butler, "and I will compel you to go "twain; for not a questionable feature can you name

\*Essay on the Sceptical tendency of Butler's "Analogy."

"in my theology as to redemption, which has not its exact counterpart in your scheme of creation. It is needless for me to deny or explain the difficulties; it is enough that I retort them, and show that you, also, are in the same case."

In reply to this and analogous criticism, it suffices to make the point that to accuse Butler's work of being a mere 'retort' implies as great a misconception of the author's avowed purpose as it is an inadequate estimate of the honesty and painstaking with which that purpose was fulfilled. Butler does not attempt to explain one difficulty by raising up another. But what he does contend is that it is illogical to reject one portion of experience simply on the ground that it contains things unexplainable, whereas the part which is accepted is filled with like difficulties.

Nor is Butler's answer simply an "argumentum ad hominem." He does show indeed that his own conclusions are capable of valid proofs even on the premises laid down by his opponents. The crude naturalistic beliefs, if pushed to their logical conclusions, will give sufficient reason for his contentions in favor of a revelation. But he does not stop there. Having taken the ground from under the feet of the inconsistent holders to mere naturalism he proceeds to suggest a positive and constructive system of all religion, both natural and revealed, and he establishes it firmly with incontrovertible proof.

The charge that Butler's "Analogy" furnished, unintentionally it is admitted, yet none the less cer-

tainly, "one of the most terrible persuasives to atheism that has ever been produced," demands, by the very gravity of the charge, a few words of explanation. The accusation in the first place, is largely due to a failure to realize what Butler really did. Some have imagined his whole aim was to examine natural religion and to find in it as many difficulties as in revealed religion, in order that they might be alike accepted because they had difficulties that were alike.

Butler's aim, however, was not to make men suspicious of religion. It was rather the effort to show that *in spite of* difficulties Christianity was eminently reasonable, and he strengthens his proof of the same immeasurably by showing that the portion which the naturalists held had in it those very characteristics which they would now make the excuse for condemnation in that part of religion which they would have rejected altogether. To see in Butler's argument only a negative course is to but half read his writings. And a work half read is in this case a work misread. The "Analogy" is not merely an argument against deism or towards naturalism. It does indeed show the analogy between the two realms, but in doing so it does not lower revelation to a naturalistic basis; it rather raises natural religion to its proper level, and vindicates it as a part of the great interconnected whole in which each bears its essential part. The "Analogy" is what it was designed to be, a defence of religion, and the unanimous verdict of scholars best qualified to judge gives it the place of pre-eminence as the greatest existing "apologia" of the Christian faith."

Without going nearly so far as the sweeping assertions of the critics already noted, yet Mr. Maurice enters his protest against the tendency of Butler's religious philosophy. Mr. Maurice has said\* that as the argument of the "Analogy" is commonly interpreted, it "assumes all moral principles to depend on "probable evidence." He also objects to Butler's appealing so often in his argument to the lower motives, to that "fear of consequences" which Shaftesbury had sought to eliminate from a pure and disinterested philosophy.

Butler's appeal to the "fear of consequences" was not a weakness, but rather a tonic healthful to an age of philosophy which Shaftesbury had come to look upon as so "pure" that there was danger of the practical being almost entirely overshadowed. Butler looking at actual life in relation to morals, saw fear evidenced as a psychological fact which could not be ignored. Realizing its significance in this life, he transferred that into its application to the life beyond, and thus obtained another link in his chain of evidence in favor of revealed religion. There is reason to commend this legitimate appeal to the actual moral life in support of his argument. Butler's philosophy is none the less "pure" on this account; on the contrary it thereby escapes the danger of evaporating into the thin air of abstractions—a danger against which Butler's critics sometimes did not sufficiently guard themselves.

\*F. D. Maurice, "Moral and Philosophical Philosophy."

\*Prospective Review Vol. X.

Mr. Maurice complains, too, that Butler has given too large a place to probability and belief. Demonstrative evidence seems to rank higher in his estimation than the less tangible proofs which these others afford. Yet Butler's position is justified to-day by true science more avowedly than ever. Knowledge acquired represents the mile-stones which mark the measure of advance on the way to higher beliefs. All life is in its practical outliving based in very real dependence on belief and probability, and Butler was one of the first to recognize this truth and to point out its significance in regard to religion. For this he is not deserving of criticism; on the contrary his insight should be admitted, and valued as a distinct line of advance on previous view-points of the probable and demonstrative.

Mr. Bagehot has yet another remarkable criticism to make. He will have it that in proving revelation Butler assumes the truth of one preconception respecting the divine character, to which nature gives no witness,—the veracity of God.\* He ranges through various fields of human inquiry and finds evidence that God, "is, on the whole, a benevolent Being; but does it follow that He will tell the truth?" He goes on to show that benevolence will sometimes lie, for the purpose of giving consolation to the sufferer, and suggests that the belief in the doctrine of a future life may be produced by some such delusive action on the part of God.

\*Prospective Review, Vol. X, p. 566

It is certainly a unique charge to make against Butler that he took for granted the truthfulness of God. But Mr. Bagehot lays himself open moreover to severe criticism when he suggests the impossibility of such a proof. It was in the first place not Butler's sphere to go into a minute philosophical analysis of the character of God. He was dealing with men who accepted in the main the belief in God, and the divine attribute of veracity was not that to which they objected. And yet Butler foresaw some such kind of folly on the part of later critics, and answered it when he wrote, "Divine goodness, with which, if I mistake not, we make very free in our speculation, is not a bare single disposition to produce happiness, but a disposition to make the good, the faithful, the honest man happy." Butler recognized the fact that God is not only love, but that He is truth as well. To say that he is therefore, guilty of making preconceived assumptions is unjust. It was neither Butler's purpose, nor was it within his exact province, to first justify this most elementary postulate of theistic belief. Though this is so, yet Butler's treatment of the subject is marked not by assumption or preconception, but by a rational demonstration of the evidences which establish the proof of the truthfulness of God.

Mr. Pattison in his essay on "Tendencies of Religious Thought in England" (1688-1750) speaks of the reading of the "Analogy" as being "depressing to the soul," and attributes this to two things. He says first, "Those periods when morals have been

" represented as the proper study of man, and his only  
" business, have been periods of spiritual abasement and  
" poverty. The denial of scientific theology, the keep-  
" ing in the background the transcendental objects of  
" faith, and the restriction of our faculties to the regu-  
" lation of conduct, seem, indeed, to be placing man in  
" the foreground of the picture, to make human nature  
" the centre round which all things revolve. But they  
" do so not by exalting the visible, but by materializ-  
" ing the invisible." And in the second place, quoting  
from " Vaughan's Essays", he applies these words to  
Butler: " To degrade religion to the position of a  
" mere purveyor of motive to morality, is not more  
" dishonorable to the ethics which must ask, than to  
" the religion which will render such assistance." In  
common justice to Butler however, it is only right to  
say that his own words and the very quotations on  
which Mr. Pattison bases his attack, are sufficient  
answer to show that the criticism of separating morals  
from religion is not applicable to him, for does he  
not say, " Our province is virtue and *religion, life*  
" and manners. This is the field assigned us to culti-  
" vate; how much it has lain neglected is indeed  
" astonishing," It is quite true he did not regard  
speculation as the chief good of man. " Knowledge "  
he says, " is not our proper happiness." But while he  
wisely abstained from vain and profitless speculation,  
he did not prosecute his inquiries the less diligently  
in both books of revelation by which God has made  
Himself known to man — Nature and the Bible. He

felt that whatever speculative theology there was apart from and different to this could be well dispensed with.

The next objection which demands our attention again finds its ablest exponent in Mr. Martineau. It relates to the different position held, as he alleges, by the difficulties in the two schemes of nature and revelation. In the one he tells us they are exceptional: in the other, they constitute the whole. He says: "In the constitution of the world, those parts and arrangements which perplex our sense of the divine justice and goodness are insignificant exceptions in a grand and righteous whole, and the gloom they would occasion, did they stand alone, is lost in a 'more exceeding glory.' It is otherwise with the doctrines by which the creeds offend the moral sense and the natural pieties; the hereditary curse of sin and ruin; the eternal punishment of helpless incapacity; the conveyance of an alien holiness by imputation; and the transfer of an infinite penalty from an alien race to a saving God. These are no exceptional incidents in the orthodox scheme, but its organic members, its very plan and life—the only thing it has to offer in exemplification of the character of God. These are not the difficulties of its 'revelation,' but the whole of it; and a theology that omits them—as its advocates will tell you—wants 'the essentials' of the Christian faith."

If the present were an occasion for discussing the

<sup>1</sup> National Review, vol. 3, p. 203.

validity of the above indictment of orthodox Christianity, perhaps the most obvious criticism would be that there are some things in the statement to which objection must be made, and exception taken on the ground that they are not correctly expressed. When orthodoxy is taxed with holding "the eternal punishment of helpless incapacity," it is convincingly in the face of facts a terse but false representation of man's final judgment as a free moral being by a divine, merciful and righteous judge. Moreover, as regards the "Analogy," Mr. Martineau's statement is only partially correct. It is by no means true that the difficulties in the natural scheme, which are analogous to those in the Christian doctrine of man's fall and consequent inheritance of depravity, are mere "insignificant exceptions." But even if they were only such, the great problem remains. The difficulties in the constitution of the natural world are as *unaccountable* as in that of revelation or orthodox Christianity. Degree is not the question, but fact. Mr. Martineau finds some things difficult to interpret in the higher department of Divine Revelation, and declines on account of them to receive it as divine. Butler shows him that there are similar and analogous difficulties in that which he does believe to be divine, and hence the presumption is that the whole may and can be believed to be divine, notwithstanding the similar hindrances. He admits the inorganic, the vegetable, and the animal creations, with their striking varieties, and few analogies, and increasing difficulties, are the work of God

and of one God ; because standing above them all he has learned to see the real principles which bind them in a great and progressive unity. He has but, (says Butler), to come forth from his dim cave of natural religion, to look away from the shadows, and stand on the sunlit summit of revelation, to find that the God of Nature and of orthodox Christianity are one. Mr. Martineau's objections are evidently the expression of a deep and strong conviction, but they find their reputation in the very incompleteness of their view.

Two more leading modern critics of Butler still remain for consideration. The "Analogy" says Leslie Stephen, "is an attempt to meet difficulties, by suggesting equal or greater difficulties. It should, therefore, lead to scepticism rather than conviction." "Butler comes near to converting the deficiency of proof into a positive ground of belief."\*

Mr. Leslie Stephen's critique of the "Analogy" as leading to scepticism, by simply meeting one difficulty with a counter problem, is in essence just a varying form of the charge of "tu quoque," with which Dr. Martineau thought Butler made retort to his opponents. But as was pointed out above, Butler's answer was not merely that. His peculiar method was especially suited to the particular position which he set himself to face ; he was not driven to it because of "deficiency of proof," and the use of it was intended not to shirk the question but to make its solution the more easy.

\* English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, Vol

Butler was discerning enough to see that to honestly recognize the obscurities in either nature or religion makes us none the less real sharers in the former or rational believers in the actualities of the latter. It does not make any difficulty vanish because we refuse to admit its presence ; it does make us incapable of determining its true value in relation to the grand scheme of which it forms a part. It is the work of the "Analogy" to show that though now we see through a glass darkly, yet there is light enough for rational faith in revealed religion. The "Analogy" leads not to scepticism but to conviction.

The last charge to be recorded against the work of Butler is that it employs a method entirely at variance with the true spirit of christianity. Matthew Arnold\* frames his objection in the following : "True Christianity wins, not by an argumentative victory, not by going through a long debate with a person. No, but it puts forward something which tends to transform him and his practice, and in such a way that he feels disposed and eager to lay hold of it. Now, it is to be observed how totally unlike a way it is to Butler's, although Butler's object is the same as Christianity's—to get people to embrace religion." Arnold is oppressed too with the spirit of doubt and gloom which he imagines pervades it ; so that after reading the "Analogy," he says, "one goes instinctively to bathe one's spirit in the Bible again, to be refreshed by its boundless certitude and exhilaration."

\*Butler and the Zeit Geist, p. 253.

Mr. Matthew Arnold is quite right in asserting that one of the most potent influences in christianity is its inherent attractiveness by which men are drawn, not driven to a belief in God. And yet it is just possible that he underestimates here the real value of the argumentative and the defensive in religion. Arnold's point is made not so much against the matter and substance, as against the method which Butler employs. In other words he makes the assumption (an unwarranted one surely) that the argumentative form of treatise is not in keeping with the spirit of Christianity. "True Christianity," he says, "wins not by an argumentative victory."

Yet error must be met by aggressive warfare, and there is need in every age for men who are brave and protestant enough to face undaunted the attacks of those who would undermine and do away with the Christian faith. It is just such a criticism as this which seeks its justification in the not uncommon statement that Christ did not make use of argument. "Christ," they say "lived a life, not a battle, he won his victories not by warfare, but by love." It is true that Christ so loved that He died to save men. But He came to save men not only from death, but from error. And Christ fought error unsparingly. He did not countenance hypocrisy or deceit. True Christianity is the unrelenting enemy of all untruth.

It is possible to find a satisfactory solution for the other feature of Butler's writings to which Arnold took exception—the apparent lack of spirituality,

the losing sight of the essence of religion in the cold and unimpassioned examination of its credentials. It must be remembered that the whole nature of his argument, the character of those to whom he addresses it—men who were suspicious of any emotional appeal, and the conclusion to which above all he sets himself to prove—the supreme obligation of duty, demanded that he should not only reject as far as possible the terminology of the spiritual teacher, but should forbear, or at least be sparing of, the appeal to scripture authority or Christian teaching.

In all the objections put forth by Butler's critics the underlying difficulty seems to consist in a common failure to fully realize what Butler's real aim was. His aim was not to prove the divine existence. That was admitted by the class to whom he devoted his arguments. He rightly takes it for proved that there is an intelligent author of nature. His work is an endeavor to show that the God of nature admitted by the Deists is a God known both through nature and revelation; and that in spite of obscurities in both He is God alike of both.

When this issue is kept in view it must be admitted by the most critical that Butler's arguments are eminently satisfactory. In this sense the "Analogy" can be regarded as a positive and valuable contribution to theological apologetic work. That it accomplished its immediate purpose in successfully controverting the deistic position is admitted alike by those who question its starting point, or who

criticize its style and method. It has shown the consistent deist that no objection can be drawn by reason or experience against natural or revealed religion, and consequently that the things objected to are not incredible. They moreover are capable of proof in the sense and to the extent that they are *not unreasonable*.

It may be that the Zeit-Geist has ushered in upon the twentieth century new phases and peculiar aspects of religious thought. But though the outer environment may have changed to some extent, it is certain that the same warfare is on between those on the one side who would reject the supra-natural, and those who see not only in nature but in revelation the guiding and controlling hand of God. And because Butler met the infidelity of his time so faithfully and so well, though other apologists have come and gone yielding service to religion in varying degrees of usefulness, the author of the "Analogy" still stands out up to our time as one of the greatest defenders of the faith; and certainly the common object of respect for the consistency, and of admiration for the courage with which he so well fulfilled the resolve of his earlier years, "to make the search for truth the great object of his life."

## CHAPTER X.

### BUTLER'S LITERARY STYLE.

It is difficult to estimate Butler's *literary position* from contemporary writings on his life and works. The scantiness of material bearing directly on the subject is due probably to Butler's own statement that he "likes not to have his life wrote while he is living."<sup>1</sup> From other sources, however, we learn that he was sent to a dissenting school kept by Samuel Jones at Gloucester, and afterwards at Tewkesbury. Jones' school is described by Butler's friend Secker (afterwards Archbishop).<sup>2</sup> There were sixteen pupils who studied "logic, Hebrew, mathematics and classics." Butler's intellectual development in his earlier years is proven by the correspondence which he carried on with Samuel Clarke, a philosopher frequently consulted by youthful inquirers.<sup>3</sup> These letters written from Tewkesbury gave evidence of the *sincerity of purpose*, and *comprehensiveness of mind* which became the marked features of all his writing.

The most general charge that has been brought against Butler's style, even by some of his warmest admirers, is that of *obscurity*. Mr. Bagehot has paid him the compliment of classification with Aristotle as "finding it hard to make his meaning clear." Sir James Mackintosh deems him "one of the best think-

<sup>1</sup> Rawlinson's MSS.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Secker to Dr. Watts

<sup>3</sup> Steere's "Remains."

ers and worst writers, being in the last particular dark and obscure." An analogous criticism of Butler's style is its apparent roughness and severity. "His words," says Maurice, "often become feeble and contradictory, because he cannot write what is struggling within him," and the first critic mentioned above has complacently styled him a poor writer, and speaks disparagingly of his "feeble words and halting sentences."

At the outset it must be admitted that Butler's style is in many cases obscure and difficult. He eschewed propping up halting argument by ornament, and openly disavowed the appearances of rhetoric. He certainly expresses real dread of mere imagination as "the author of all error, that forward delusive faculty, ever obtruding beyond its sphere."<sup>1</sup> It was Butler's special purpose, too, to avoid as far as possible using any of the terms currently employed in dogmatic theology. As a consequence of his desire not to become implicated or misinterpreted by the adoption or adaption of old expressions, he sometimes has resource to a circuitous phraseology, which bears the appearance of indistinctness of thought. On the other hand the very atmosphere in which Butler lived was laden with a speculative rather than a practical odor. As Horace Walpole says, "He had been wafted into his See in a cloud of metaphysic,"<sup>2</sup> and he remained absorbed in it. It is little wonder then that the

<sup>1</sup> Analogy, Part I, Chap. I.

<sup>2</sup> George II, I, p. 148.

general style of Butler's works should be tinged with the same abstract, and at times, obscure spirit

Butler was all the while deeply conscious that his style would not be found popular or attractive to the "profanum vulgus" of superficial readers. Of this indeed he imagined the very nature of his subject would scarcely permit. He admitted it was "very allowable for a work of imagination or entertainment not to be of easy comprehension," but thought it "might be unavoidable in a work of another kind, where a man is not to form or accommodate, but to state things as he finds them."<sup>1</sup> Such obscurity and and roughness as may exist in Butler's writings did not at any rate arise from negligence.

Another redeeming feature in regard to Butler's style is the fact that allowance must be made for the seemingly affected phraseology of the days in which he wrote, and moreover, of the usage of terms in a different signification from that commonly attached to them in our own day. If Butler be obscure to the modern reader, he is yet very much less so than many of his immediate predecessors. The qualities, however, of obscurity and difficulty in their final analysis belong not so much to the form as to the matter of Butler's works. The arguments are invariably compressed, all are parts of one organic whole, and constant effort is required in order to grasp the relations of each individual piece of reasoning. The style is rather a necessary reflection of the matter, than an obscuration of it.

Perhaps the most common, if not also the best founded objection which has been brought against Butler's style is its supposed "*lack of persuasiveness*." He pays little attention to what the Latin rhetoricians called the "conciliation" of his readers. While none have accused him of unfairness, and few of bitterness in controversy, yet many have thought him hard and unsympathetic. Some have even fancied they discerned a spirit of high contempt for the shallowness of the opinions he is confuting.

It is true indeed Butler does not give vent to many expressions of pity for the class of objectors he has to deal with, and to the ordinary reader his arguments may seem to be thrown down as a challenge. But to estimate aright the attitude which he took, it is necessary to understand the spirit of the age in which he lived and wrote. It was a time which called pre-eminently for a man to herald the truth with no uncertain sound. It was no time for easy words and mincing phrases. The spirit of Deism had made infidelity and agnosticism rampant on every side, and Butler met that spirit boldly. And there is no lack of calm, impressive earnestness in his appeals to those who are careless of finding out the truth, as full of practical wisdom they must also be allowed to be. Butler's olive branches had to be discharged from a catapult.

And Butler's style, while harsh at times, never descended to a confusion of the contempt for his oppo-

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<sup>1</sup> Henneff, "Butler and His Recent Critics."

nents' arguments, with personal imputations of moral obliquity. Moreover, though he were wanting in some of the qualifications of the professional advocate, he is strong in a point which has always been recognized as an essential requisite in one who would persuade men—the creation in the minds of his readers of the conviction of his own moral integrity and earnestness of purpose. Butler has proven himself absolutely unassailable on this point, and while men may reject his method, or criticize the matter which he has put forward, yet all yield to him a willing recognition of his strong conviction and purity of purpose. In this Butler stands far above the reach of cavil.

Objections against his style and manner have been many in number and various in degree. Some have thought him cold and unsympathetic, others charge him with being too enthusiastic. Mr. Stephen says he is "no philosopher,"<sup>1</sup> while Mr. Matthew Arnold tells us he is "a better moralist than theologian,"<sup>2</sup> with what Stephen terms "that happy discrepancy of able criticism which is the solace of the criticized." However, both (and in this they do but express the universal judgment) are ungrudging in their admiration of his honesty, his moderation and forbearance.

Butler's work is so great that deficiencies in style are not sufficient to weaken its real strength. The

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Stephen's *History of English Thought*, Vol. II.

<sup>2</sup> *The Zeit-Geist*.

inherent value of the "Analogy" as an apologetic overshadows the form in which it is cast, and insures for it a place for all time high in ethical and religious literature and thought.

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## NOTE.

The following works, to which the above treatise is indebted, have been consulted:—

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